



## MSDE Education Bulletin, May 28, 2015

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### MARYLAND'S STATE TESTS TO BE STREAMLINED

Maryland students in grades 3-8 and high school will spend less time taking State assessments next year as a result of changes approved unanimously by the multi-state consortium governing the tests.



Next year's PARCC Assessment will be shorter under a new plan approved by the test consortium.

The Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) last week voted to consolidate the PARCC assessment's two testing windows into one and cut total test time by about 90 minutes overall beginning in the 2015-16 school year. The changes were made in response to feedback from parents, students, and educators during the first year of testing and a careful review of test design.

"Next year's PARCC tests will take less time away from lessons, and cause less disruption to school schedules, while still keeping students on track for college and careers," said State

Superintendent of School Lillian M. Lowery.

“These changes will help us focus on what’s most important—ensuring that students are learning to think critically and master the skills they will need to graduate, ready for success, she added.”

The revisions to PARCC will:

- Combine the two English language arts and two math testing windows to one 30-day window near the end of the semester or the school year.
- Reduce the number of test units that students will take from 8 or 9, depending upon the grade level, to 7 or 6.
- Cut the testing time for students by about 90 minutes overall depending on content and grade level.

The first full year of PARCC implementation in Maryland has gone smoothly for the most part, with more than 1.3 million tests administered and completed. The new assessments, aligned to Maryland’s College and Career Ready Standards, replaced the Maryland School Assessment tests this year.

More on the PARCC changes can be found [here](#).

## KINDERGARTEN READINESS DATA REVEALS GAPS

Maryland’s new Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) finds that nearly half of Maryland’s incoming students in the fall of 2014 were fully ready for learning. The data, released last week in a report presented to the Maryland State Board of Education, offers a new baseline for assessing kindergarten readiness to help elevate readiness for all Maryland school children.



Assistant State Superintendent Rolf Grafwallner and Howard County kindergarten teacher Laura Brown outline the KRA results for the State Board.

The report, *Readiness Matters!*, found that 47 percent of incoming kindergartners were fully ready to begin learning. Another 36 percent were “approaching” readiness, while 17 percent were “emerging.” The results uncovered gaps in readiness between certain student groups. The report provides insights into readiness and children’s experience with various forms of pre-K experience.

“Preparing our youngest learners to be successful means getting them on track—and keeping them on track—as we gauge their progress in an age-appropriate way,” said State Superintendent of Schools Lillian M. Lowery. “As we do so, we must continue to

address readiness gaps across the board, so that all students have the chance to succeed in school.”

MSDE worked with local educators to develop the KRA, and has since engaged educators, including kindergarten teachers, to strengthen the assessment process. For example, next year’s version of the KRA will be 20 percent shorter, with some of the more time-intensive items

removed. An enhanced reporting feature will be in place in 2015-16 when teachers can get on-time reports of their students' skill levels.

MSDE has worked with school systems to improve access to technology and Wi-Fi for teachers working with the KRA, and MSDE will provide additional professional development for teachers.

More than half of White and Asian-American children are entering kindergarten ready to learn -- 57 and 53 percent, respectively. But only 43 percent of African-American students are fully prepared for kindergarten and just 27 percent of Hispanic students are kindergarten-ready. The data also revealed that students from low-income households, those for whom English is a second language, and students with special learning challenges were not as well prepared.

The KRA measures the skills and behaviors that children should learn prior to entering kindergarten. It combines age-appropriate, standardized performance tasks that measure students' specific skills, along with focused observations of children's work and play, to best understand what each entering kindergartner knows and is able to do in four key areas: social foundations; physical well-being and motor development; language and literacy; and mathematics.

This assessment replaces the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) assessment, in use since 2001. The new assessment is needed to put young students on a path toward meeting Maryland's more rigorous Pre-K through 12th grade college and career ready standards. The KRA sets a new baseline for tracking student progress in future years, aligned to the higher standards. The results are not directly comparable to the MMSR, which found in 2013 that 83 percent of kindergartners entering school in 2013 were "fully ready" to learn.

The new KRA data can be found [here](#).

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## A few words from State Superintendent of Schools Lillian M. Lowery



**State Superintendent of Schools**  
**Lillian M. Lowery**

Maryland public schools this month received another accolade: US News & World Report found that our State had the highest percentage of top performing high schools. All credit goes to the educators at those schools, who work hard every day to prepare students for college and career.

Nearly 30 percent of Maryland high schools ranked among the high performers in its latest national study. Maryland had 28.9 percent of its schools in the top tiers, followed by California (27.2 percent) and Connecticut (25.4 percent). The publication based its measure on the percentage of students participating in--and achieving passing scores--on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams. In addition, students must do well on state assessments.

The complete report can be found [here](#).

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Maryland public education has had the great benefit of an outstanding group of citizens on the Maryland State Board of Education. That continues with the introduction of two new State Board members this month. Chester E. Finn, Jr., Ed.D. of Montgomery County and Andy Smarick of Queen Anne's County were appointed by Governor Larry Hogan to fill two seats on the 12-member board vacated by the departures of Charlene M. Dukes, Ed.D. and Donna Hill Staton, Esq., whose terms ended in 2014.

Dr. Finn is a Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institute, where he is Chairman of the K-12 Education Task Force. He also is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, where his primary focus is reforming primary and secondary schooling. Mr. Smarick is a partner at Bellwether Education Partners, a national nonprofit dedicated to helping education organizations – in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors – become more effective in their work and achieve dramatic results for students. He served as a deputy assistant secretary at the U.S. Department of Education and an education aide at The White House Domestic Policy Council.

Dr. Dukes and Ms. Hill Staton oversaw major improvements in teaching and learning, student safety and advances in digital learning. Our students' lives are better because of their service.

During the tenures of Dr. Dukes and Ms. Hill Staton, the State Board established a record of achievements that positively impacted students in a variety of ways. During their tenure, the State Board of Education adopted higher standards, oversaw the alignment to more advanced state assessments, and increased support for teachers and school leaders. Maryland was recognized for its pioneering work in studying long-term student suspensions and expulsions, and revising its school disciplinary regulations to focus on keeping students in schools and connected to learning.

More on the new Board members and departing Board members can be found [here](#).

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## Video Highlights

### [Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching](#)

April 10, 2015

Maryland seeks nominees for the [Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching](#). Past honoree Tim Emhoff of Charles County talks with Maryland Superintendent Dr. Lillian Lowery about what the award has meant to him. Nominations are now closed.

[Windows Media Version](#)

[QuickTime Version](#)

[MP4 Version](#)

### [Financial Literacy Class - Stock Market Game](#)

April 17, 2015

Florence Falatko's class at Cromwell Valley Elementary learns financial literacy by playing the Stock Market Game. It's just part of the course designed to teach young students early about the

value of a dollar.

[Windows Media Version](#)

[QuickTime Version](#)

[MP4 Version](#)



*MSDE Video Highlights: Financial Literacy Class - Stock Market Game*

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## Calendar

June 5 - Maryland Parent Involvement Matters Awards, Baltimore

June 23 - Maryland State Board of Education meeting, Baltimore

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## In the News

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[States Vote to Reduce Length of Common Core Test](#)

*Washington Post*

[47 Percent of Incoming Kindergartners Ready to Learn](#)

*News Post/AP*

[Netscape Founder, Wife, Donate Computers to Pratt Library](#)

*Baltimore Sun*



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